

PLATO, ARISTOTLE, AND THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN  
IN EARLY JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

by

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The purpose of this paper is to consider the relationship between Ancient Greek philosophy and early Jewish philosophy in the particular concept of woman articulated by Philo, Solomon Ibn Gabirol (Avicenna), Moses Ben Maimon (Maimonides), and Leone Ebreo (Jehudah Abrabanel). <sup>1</sup> While the concept of woman in Jewish thought has often been approached through a study of religious writings or historical documents, there has been little written on the specific philosophical components of the theory of woman's identity. Therefore, this paper will seek to demonstrate the similarities and differences in the concepts of woman in four Jewish philosophers who lived between the first and the sixteenth centuries AD. In addition, the relation between these views and the theories of Plato and Aristotle will be examined.

#### The Concept of Woman in Ancient Greek Philosophy

As in so many fields in philosophy, the pre-Socratics set the direction of the history of the concept of woman by asking the fundamental questions. When the fragments of their writings are examined it becomes clear that their questions fell into four broad categories which can be identified as: Opposites, Generation, Wisdom, and Virtue. In The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution (750BC-1250 AD) I have given a detailed analysis of these categories of questions in early western Philosophy.<sup>2</sup> To summarize briefly, the fundamental questions associated with each category are the following: Are male and female opposite or the same?; What is the relation between a mother's and father's contribution to generation and sex identity?; Are women and men wise in the same or different ways?; and Are men and women virtuous in the same or different ways? The answers to these questions filtered through Greek Philosophy into Jewish Philosophy.

The nature of woman from a philosophical perspective -2-  
the heart of Jewish considerations include

Specifically, the Pythagorean table of opposites which associated the male with the left and the female with the right, Hippocratean medical theory which associated the male with hot and female with cold, the preoccupation with the existence and nature of female and male seed, the association of the female with the lower and the male with the higher powers of the soul, and the question of the proper spheres of activity for man and woman all worked their way into the heart of Jewish consideration of the nature of woman from a philosophical perspective. By 'philosophical' here is meant an appeal to reason and the observation of the senses for evidence in support of a theory, rather than an appeal to faith, religious authority, or some other basis.

With Plato and Aristotle the philosophical approach to the concept of woman took a giant leap forward beyond the original questions and fragments left by the pre-Socratics. The leap consisted in a move from question to theory in the specific attempt to develop a consistent answer to the four questions listed above across all the categories identified as opposites, generation, wisdom, and virtue. If the two concepts of 'equality' and 'differentiation' are used, then the theories of sex identity which emerged in Greek philosophy can be identified as: sex unity (defends the equality and non differentiation of the sexes), sex neutrality (assumes but does not defend directly the equality and non differentiation of the sexes), sex polarity (defends a philosophically significant differentiation of the sexes and a superiority of one sex over the other), and sex complementarity (defends a philosophically significant differentiation of the sexes but maintains the fundamental equality of worth of both sexes). Plato is the founder of the sex unity theory, Aristotle of the sex polarity and sex neutrality theory, and Empedocles suggests a sex complementarity theory. In subsequent theories of sex identity in Jewish philosophy the interplay of these different Greek theories is clearly seen.

In order to aid the tracing of the similarities between the concept of woman in early Jewish Philosophy and the theories of Plato and Aristotle the following summary lists the main points of their theories by category. While Plato was identified above as the founder of the sex unity theory, he also had some aspects of sex polarity in his works. Generally, sex unity is found in the Republic and Laws, and sex polarity in the Timaeus. The Symposium, with its central role for Diotima, supports the equality of man and woman in the category of wisdom.<sup>3</sup>.

Plato's Concept of Woman

Sex Polarity on  
Cosmic Level

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
<u>Opposites</u>	Forms active, like a Father	Receptacle passive like a Mother
<u>Generation</u>	Souls fall first into male bodies	Souls of cowardly or immoral men fall into female bodies
<u>Wisdom</u>	Forms are source of wisdom	Matter is source of ignorance
<u>Virtue</u>	-----	-----

Sex Unity in  
the world

	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>
<u>Opposites</u>		Same identity by nature of the soul
<u>Generation</u>		Same generation through incarnation
<u>Wisdom</u>	Begins life stronger	Begins life weaker
		Same capacity for philosophy
		Same education
<u>Virtue</u>	Begins life stronger	Begins life weaker
		Same function and virtue as workers, soldiers, and philosopher rulers

Aristotle is described as the founder of sex polarity because he was the first philosopher to argue consistently that there are philosophically significant differences between men and women and that man is by nature superior to woman. His theory of sex polarity is developed in the Generation of Animals, Metaphysics, Nicomachean Ethics, and Politics. In addition, in the Organon Aristotle developed a theory which became later a basis for sex neutrality, namely that sexual differentiation is not significant to logic which focuses on species in general. Jewish philosophy appears to be influenced by these two different approaches to questions of sex identity. A summary of Aristotle's theory follows:<sup>4</sup>.

Aristotle's Concept of Woman

Sex Polarity  
in the world

	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>
<u>Opposites</u>	superior contrary, hot, like form, active	inferior contrary, cold, like matter, passive, privation
<u>Generation</u>	fertile seed, provides soul	no seed, provides body
<u>Wisdom</u>	rational soul capable of ruling irrational soul, wisdom, public speech	rational soul without authority over irrational soul, opinion, silence
<u>Virtue</u>	to rule by nature, public sphere of activity, superior friend	to obey by nature, private sphere of activity, inferior friend

Sex Neutrality  
in Logic

	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>
	Both included in species man	Sex distinction not philosophically relevant

Insert 4a

The spurious Oeconomus which was most likely derived from the Oeconomicus of Xenophon supported sex polarity in the separation of the public and private spheres of activity for men and women, respectively. Even though this text was not written by Aristotle, it was associated with his name well into the late Medieval period.

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Now that the theories of Plato and Aristotle have been briefly summarized, it is possible to turn to a consideration of the four Jewish philosophers under consideration.

Philo (13BC-54AD)

While it is difficult to ascertain a direct influence of Greek philosophers on Philo's concept of woman, there are many striking similarities between his views and some aspects of Pythagorean thought, Plato, and Aristotle. Some of these views may have come through the Stoic writings with which he was familiar.

In the area of generation, Philo's views exactly parallels that of Aristotle who had argued that the female only provided a passive material to the fetus while the male provided the active seminal cause. In Questions and Answers on Genesis he stated:

The matter of the female in the remains of the menstrual fluids produces the fetus. But the male (provides) the skill and the cause. And so, since the male provides the greater and more necessary (part) in the process of generation, it is proper that his pride should be checked by the sign of circumcision, but the material element, being inanimate, does not admit of arrogance. 5.

The Aristotelian theory of the passive contribution of woman and the active contribution of man to generation is used in this passage to justify circumcision for men but not for women. In a different passage from Questions on Exodus Philo used this same distinction to justify the choice of a sheep for the Passover meal:

Why is a sheep chosen? Symbolically, as I have said, it indicates perfect progress, and at the same time, the male, for progress is nothing else than the giving up of the female gender by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal and sense-perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought. 6

From these two examples then, a similarity is seen between Aristotle's and Philo's theory of opposites and generation.

A further similarity is found in the category of wisdom. In Questions and Answers on Genesis Philo uses an allegory to identify man with the higher part of the soul and woman with the lower part of the soul: "In the allegorical sense,...woman is a symbol of sense, and man of mind." 7.

This same division is repeated later in the text: "The serpent is a symbol of desire,...and woman is a symbol of sense, and man of mind."<sup>8</sup> This identification of woman with the lower part of the soul and man with the higher is continued in Philo's analysis of the masculine and feminine. In the same text on Genesis he argued that within each individual's soul there are masculine and feminine thoughts:

But as for the deeper meaning, in the soul of progressive man there are some thoughts that are masculine, and some offspring that are feminine...Which then are the masculine thoughts?

Those which are emulous of wisdom and of all virtue in general and that which is truly good and alone is good. But the feminine kind, having position of daughters, are under service to bodily needs and are under the dominion of the passions.<sup>9</sup>

This view that the feminine is 'under the dominion of the passions' is similar in structure to the claim of Aristotle that in woman 'reason is without authority'.<sup>10</sup>

Philo further follows Aristotle's introduction of a principle of generation in the context of explaining the differences in their reasoning capacities:

It is fitting and proper for it to bring together these (parts) which may have been divided and separated, not that the masculine thoughts may be made womanish and relaxed by softness, but that the female element, the senses, may be made manly by following masculine thoughts and by receiving from them seed for procreation.<sup>11</sup>

The male as the provider of fertile seed, and the female as the passive receptacle for seed is a fundamental part of Philo's concept of woman. He also devalued the female element in his derogatory reference to softness and womanish thoughts.

So just as the woman played a passive role in generation, so feminine thoughts ought to be passive in receiving the active ordering of masculine thoughts in the mind.

Philo is often identified as a Platonic philosopher. In the concept of woman, however, he often goes beyond Plato by using his theories to support a sex polarity position. In the following example Philo borrowed a metaphor

from Plato's Phaedrus to further his theory. Plato had compared women's and men's living quarters to parts of the mind, but Philo extended the metaphor to include the following applications to women's reasoning capacity:

And the woman's quarters are a place where womenly opinions go about and dwell, being followers of the female sex. And the female sex is irrational and akin to bestial passions, fear, sorrow, pleasure, and desire. <sup>12</sup>

Plato had argued on the contrary that women were capable of the same rationality as men. Therefore, Philo interpreted and extended Plato's example to support a sex polarity theory.

Before passing to a different aspect of Philo's concept of woman it should be mentioned that he did not always divide the mind into male and female parts. Sometimes he divided it into two different orders of male parts: the rational man and the sensible man. <sup>13</sup> He also sometimes divided it into two different orders of female parts: the higher part symbolized by Sarah and Leah and the lower part symbolized by Hagar or Rachel. <sup>14</sup> However, far more significant to this study is the consistent separation of man and woman, male and female, and masculine and feminine in relation to the mind, and the equally consistent devaluation of the woman, female, and feminine in relation to man, male, and masculine.

One of the consequences of Philo's sex polarity theory in the category of wisdom is that woman was more likely to be deceived than man. Her passivity made her unable to discern error. In Questions and Answers on Genesis he stated:

Woman is more accustomed to being deceived than man. For his judgment, like his body, is masculine and is capable of dissolving or destroying the designs of deception but the judgment of woman is more feminine, and because of softness she easily gives way and is taken in by plausible falsehoods which resemble the truth. <sup>15</sup>

The association of woman with the senses carries forward similar consequences

because the senses, which are easily deceived, can also then deceive the mind.<sup>16</sup> Once again the similarity between Philo and Aristotle is striking. Aristotle had argued that a woman was capable of only true opinion because she could not carry forward the difficult reasoning process needed to acquire wisdom associated with the syllogism because of the weakness of her mind. The one difference in their views appears to be that Aristotle identified woman's coldness and moistness and Philo identified woman's softness as the source of her weak capacities for reasoning.

In the category of virtue Philo introduces an analogy between virtue as male and thought as female by emphasizing a difference in the relation of activity and passivity to the two sexes:

If anyone is willing to divest facts of the terms which obscure them, and observe them in their nakedness in a clear light he will understand that virtue is male, since it causes movement and affects conditions and suggests noble conceptions of noble deeds and words, while thought is female, being moved and trained and helped, and in general belonging to the passive category, ~~and in general~~ belonging to the passive category, which passivity is its sole means of preservation. <sup>17</sup>

The association of the male with the source of movement and the female with the passive reception of movement is again a clear repetition of the Aristotelian position. The link between the passive contribution of the female to generation and a theory of virtue is made explicit by Philo in Questions and Answers on Genesis:

Giving birth is wholly peculiar to woman, just as begetting is to man. Scripture therefore wishes the soul of the virtuous man to be likened to the male sex rather than the female, considering that activity rather than passivity is congenial to him.<sup>18</sup>

Even though Philo argued that virtue is more properly identified with the male sex rather than the female sex, he did not claim that woman could not be virtuous. For example, he used Sarah as a symbol of virtue in On Mating with the Preliminary Studies.<sup>19</sup> However, there is a deeper sense

in which the fuller or better virtue is associated with man because virtue is an active rather than passive aspect of human nature.

Finally, Philo stated that there are different proper spheres of activity for the two sexes: the public sphere for man and the private sphere for woman. In Questions and Answers on Genesis he stated:

For to man are entrusted the public affairs of state; while to a woman the affairs of the home are proper. The lack of her is ruin, but her being near at hand constitutes household management. 20

In this differentiation of virtuous activity Philo follows the arguments of Xenophon as well as the common practice of the time.

Summary  
In conclusion, while there is no direct evidence that Philo was influenced by Aristotle's writings on the concept of woman, his theory in the four categories of opposites, generation, wisdom, and virtue exactly parallel the same line of argument found in Aristotle. In this way, Philo as one of the earliest Jewish philosophers participates in the transmission of a theory of sex polarity in western philosophy. His theory may be summarized as follows:

	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>
<u>Opposites</u>	Active, akin to rational	Passive, akin to senses
<u>Generation</u>	Provides form, source	Provides matter
<u>Wisdom</u>	Masculine thought is perfect wisdom  Good judgment	Feminine thought is ruled by passions  Deceptive judgments
<u>Virtue</u>	Rule by activity, Public sphere of activity	Obey by passivity, Private sphere of activity

Solomon Ibn Gabirol ( 1021-1058)

Historically there was much confusion about the identity of Solomon Ibn Gabirol. He lived in Spain and wrote in Arabic which led some scholars to conclude that he was an Islamic or Christian philosopher. He was given the name Avicenna by the Latins, and it was not until 1845 that Solomon Ibn Gabirol was positively identified as a Jewish philosopher. His philosophy of sex identity falls strongly in the sex neutrality tradition. For this reason he is strikingly different from his predecessor Philo.

In his most central philosophical work entitled The Fountain of Life there is no mention of male or female in any context. Even God is simply referred to as the primary creator, rather than as the Father. One central reason for this sex neutrality orientation of the text may be the influence of Aristotle's logic. In The Fountain of Life Solomon Ibn Gabirol refers to Aristotle's categories of form, matter, genus, differentia, substance, species, actuality, and potentiality. Within the framework of Aristotelian logic only the species man is significant. Sexual differentiation refers to accidental aspects of substance, and therefore it does not hold a proper place in syllogistic reasoning. Therefore, an implicit consequence of the spread of Aristotelian logic as a basis for philosophy is that sex identity becomes irrelevant for philosophy. Or, philosophy becomes inherently sex neutral.

The rigor with which Solomon Ibn Gabirol adheres to a sex neutrality is seen in his discussion of generation. In numerous discussions of generation he never mentioned sex identity. For example, he recorded the following answer to a question about the nature of generation:

Teacher: What is growth and what is reproduction?

Pupil: Reproduction is to engender a thing from its similar. 21.

Then in another context in which one might expect a discussion of male seed

as a highly reformed material of nutrition, Solomon Ibn Gabirol simply considers the relation between nutrition and reproduction without any reference to male or female.<sup>22</sup> His philosophy is totally in the tradition of sex neutrality as first developed in Aristotelian logic.

However, in an interesting second level of thought, in the cosmic description of the relation of God and man sexual differentiation is introduced in Solomon Ibn Gabirol's poetry. In The Kingly Crown he gave a free expression to masculine and feminine metaphors. Sometimes the soul was given a feminine personification in relation to a male God as for example when he stated: "My soul shall declare to Thee Thou are her former...She serves Thee as handmaid while yet in the body."<sup>23</sup> Then in another passage he inverted the masculine and feminine dynamic when he described God with a feminine personification in relation to himself: "O my God! ...As a suckling child didst Thou nurse me."<sup>24</sup> In poetry then, Solomon Ibn Gabirol did introduce sex distinctions.

How can the radical difference between a sex neutrality in philosophy and a free use of sex distinctions in poetry or religion be explained? It may be that the influence of Aristotelian logic had begun to assume a fundamental importance in framing what was considered to be the proper subject of philosophy. In line with this suggestion it is interesting to note that a contemporary of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Anselm (1033-1109), made a similar distinction with regard to expressions of sex identity. In his philosophical works a position of sex neutrality was found , while in his prayers God was introduced as nurse and mother.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it would appear to be the possible effect of Aristotelian logic that led to a redefinition of philosophy as sex neutral.

The philosophy of Aristotle made its way to Europe in different stages. In the first phase, before the time of Philo, commentaries were written

in Greek by followers of the Peripatetic tradition. Then from the third to sixth centuries AD the neo-Platonic philosophers continued this tradition. Porphyry wrote a commentary on Aristotle's logic entitled the Isagoge. In the fifth and sixth centuries Aristotle's works began to be translated into other languages. The Categories were translated into Syriac. Boethius translated the Organon into Latin. It is the renewed interest in these texts of Aristotle's logic that probably influenced Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Anselm in their emphasis upon sex neutrality for philosophy.

By the ninth century, most of Aristotle's works were translated into Arabic. These texts made Aristotle's arguments about sex identity available to Avicenna and Averroes, the major philosophers in the development of Islamic philosophy. Avicenna (980-1037) wrote the Kitab al-shifa which contained commentaries on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Ethics, Politics, and Generation of Animals, all of which contained important arguments in support of sex polarity.<sup>26</sup> Then Averroes(1126-1198) wrote thirty-eight different commentaries on the works of Aristotle which provided a rich source for the Greek philosopher's theory of sex polarity. Significantly, however, Averroes also wrote a commentary on Plato's Republic which defended a sex unity position.<sup>27</sup> His own philosophy developed into an intriguing combination of Aristotelian and Platonic theories. Basically, Averroes argued for a sex polarity orientation for the masses who followed religion, and a sex unity orientation for the elite who followed philosophy. In this choice he demonstrated a similar separation of philosophy that was seen in both Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Anselm. The common thread is that for philosophy sexual differentiation is not significant.

Before concluding this section on Solomon Ibn Gabirol it should be noted that in a book of ethical maxims entitled Choice of Pearls there is a second hand report of some of his views. For example, Xanthippe, the

the wife of Socrates was described as being rebuked for her tearful emotions at Socrates' impending death.<sup>28</sup> This is a common reference in Stoic literature which was normally used to support the contention that women are unable to govern their passions.

In another passage Solomin Ibn Gabirol is quoted as stating: "The best of animals needs the whip, the purest of women a husband, and the cleverest of men to ask advice."<sup>29</sup> This passage might be interpreted to imply that Solomon Ibn Gabirol thought that a woman needed a man to help her achieve self-governance. The location of the reference to woman between the forced obedience of an animal by a whip and the simple solicitation of advice among men is probably an accurate indication of the middle area in which woman was thought to be dependent upon man. However, it is impossible to conclude anything from these simple maxims concerning Solomon Ibn Gabirol's theory of sex identity. In general then, his philosophy appears to assume a sex neutrality position which had its likely source in Aristotelian logic, while his poetry, religious and popular works allowed for a more free introduction of sexual distinction.

#### Moses Ben Maimon (1135-1204)

Educated in rabbinic schools in Egypt and trained as a physician Moses Ben Maimon had access to arguments about sex identity through the writings of Philo, Hippocrates, and Galen. In addition he discovered the Greek philosophers through Alexander of Aphrodisias, Al-Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes. By integrating the theories of his predecessors into the context of Jewish religious thought Moses ben Maimon articulated a modified sex polarity. He became known more popularly as Maimonides and as Rambam.

In The Guide for the Perplexed Moses Ben Maimon took Plato's

view of the Mother Receptical as a passive recipient of the Forms to emphasize the sexual identification with these two metaphysical categories :"Plato and his predecessors designated Matter as the female and Form as the male."<sup>30</sup> Then, using Philo's method of allegorical interpretation he compared matter to an unfaithful married woman:

The nature and the true reality of matter are such that it never ceases to be joined to privation; hence no form remains constantly in it, for it perpetually puts off one form and puts on another. How extraordinary is what Solomon said in his wisdom when likening matter to a married harlot, for matter is in no way found without form and is consequently always like a married woman who is never separated from a man and is never free.<sup>31</sup>

In another passage from The Guide this association of woman with formless matter is extended beyond the limited category of an unfaithful married woman to represent everything female:

Man ('ish) and woman ('ishshah) are terms that at first were given the meaning of a human male and a human female. Afterwards they were used figuratively to designate any male or female among the other species of living beings. Thus it says: Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee seven and seven, the man and his woman. It is as if it said male and female. Thereupon the term woman was used figuratively to designate any object apt for, and fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with some other object.<sup>32</sup>

The female, or woman, had no identity alone, just as matter could not be alone. Woman had to be in union with a man in order to have an identity, just as matter had to be in union with form to be anything specified. On the other hand, the male or man or form had an identity on its own without necessarily being in conjunction with another. Therefore, Moses ben Maimon introduces the matter/form distinction in the category of opposites to suggest a theory of sex polarity.

It is in the category of generation that Aristotle's significance is introduced. In The Medical Aphorisms, in the context of a discussion criticizing Galen for not drawing the necessary consequences about the purity of male blood from the fundamental principle that the male is hotter than the

female Moses Ben Maimon stated:

It is also possible that he(Galen) did not finish (reading and studying) the words of Aristotle, or that he didn't see or know of them, and therefore didn't mention them when he commented on this book. One may hear the statement of Aristotle and his words in this matter (in the original) in the eighteenth treatise of his book "animalia" where he asserts: "The warmth that is found in the female is weak, although occasionally some people claim the opposite of this, namely that the blood in the female is more abundant than the male...They further think that blood in general has this same form, and it is sufficient for them that it is moist and has the appearance of blood. They do not know, however, that (women) have very little pure blood containing good chymes and that the menstrual blood is not at all pure." This is the statement of Aristotle and it is the truth. 33

Moses Ben Maimon accepted Aristotle's claim that the seed was a more highly purified form of blood. It was formed by a process of transformation of nutrition. In the "Discourse on Sexual Intercourse" he stated: "The sperm is a residue from the aliments left over and above what has been required for the organs during the third digestion." 34 Similarly, in the Medical Aphorisms he argued that the milk of mothers is also a purified form of nutrition: "Milk of the mother is the proper nutrition for the newborn infant, because its composition is the same as the blood from which he was created." 35 Therefore, in the question of male seed and female milk Moses Ben Maimon directly followed Aristotle's theory.

The question of whether female seed exists appears to have been left open. Apparently following Galen, Moses Ben Maimon argued that female seed, if it existed, was infertile. In a passage from his commentaries on the Commandments he argued that women did not have to make an offering for an involuntary influx of seed, whereas men did. Woman's significant contribution to generation was limited to menstrual fluid:

It is the emission of semen that makes a man liable for an offering, but if a woman has a sort of emission of semen, she is not a zavah, and it is only a flux of blood that makes a woman liable for an offering, whereas a flux of blood does not make a man liable. The word 'flux' means only 'flowing out',

and what flows out is not always the same thing. The Sages say explicitly: "a man conveys uncleanness through semen, a woman through blood." 36.

That Moses Ben Maimon did not consider the presence of seed in woman to be important is further attested to by the fact that in The Guide for the Perplexed where he described male and female organs of reproduction, no location for the production of female seed is mentioned.<sup>37</sup> Finally, in The Book of Women he stated: "The obligation to be fruitful and multiply is incumbent upon the man but not on the woman."<sup>38</sup>.

In a rather fascinating integration of early Pythagorean theory which had probably been transmitted through Hippocratean writings Moses Ben Maimon used the association of the male with the right and the female with the left in a discussion about the determination of the sex of a fetus:

One should examine a male at the time he reaches puberty. If his right testicle is larger, he will give rise to male offspring; if it is the left, he will give rise to females. The same situation applies for the breasts of a girl at the time of puberty. 39

In another passage he focused on the location of the fetus in the uterus:

Male (fetuses), in the majority of instances, are conceived by the woman on the right side (of the uterus) whereas the female (fetus) is conceived on the left side. The reverse of this situation only happens exceptionally. 40

In the traditional Pythagorean association of female with left and male with right, the left is usually given an inferior identification with bad, dark, and so forth, and the right is given a superior association with good, light and so forth. Therefore, there is often a hidden sex polarity within the Pythagorean table of opposites.

In the category of wisdom Moses Ben Maimon did not make any direct references to Aristotle's concept of woman. However, there are many similarities in their structure of argument. In The Guide four common ways in which people are considered to be wise are listed: 1) the possession of rational virtues; 2) the possession of moral virtues, 3) the possession of practical arts, and 4) the possession of cunning. Woman is mentioned only in

relation to the third category: "The term is applied to acquiring arts, whatever the art might be...and (to) all women that were wisehearted." <sup>41</sup> By implication women were wise through a practical knowledge of particulars, rather than through a reasoned knowledge of principles. In Aristotle's philosophy this is considered the wisdom of true opinion rather than the wisdom derived from the correct use of syllogism in demonstration.

For Moses Ben Maimon both the rational and moral virtues demanded a three step process: 1) knowledge of the Torah learned through tradition, 2) wisdom learned through demonstrative philosophical argumentation, 3) and a particular action determined to follow from a combination of the first and second sources. Concerning the first step, he argued that "women are not under obligation to study the Torah." <sup>42</sup> Then in relation to the second step he argued in an essay entitled "On the Management of Health" that women have no knowledge of philosophy:

Therefore you find these passions have a very great influence only on those individuals having no knowledge of philosophical ethics or the disciplines and admonitions of the Law---such as youths, women and foolish men. For due to the excessive tenderness of their souls, these people become anxious and despair. <sup>43</sup>

The view that women are 'without authority' over their emotions is repeated in The Guide:

As women are prone to anger, being easily affected and having weak souls, there would have been grave troubles, quarrels, and disorder in the house, if their oaths had been under their control... Therefore, the matter, with everything pertaining to it, is given into the charge of the master of the house. <sup>44</sup>

The 'excessive tenderness' and 'weakness' of women's souls lead to the conclusion that a woman is virtuous more by obeying a virtuous man than by philosophically determining their own path of moral action.

The identification of the female with matter and the male with form is also introduced in the context of a discussion of virtue to support the value of obedience for the female and ruling for the male.

In the following passage from The Guide the 'woman of virtue' is identified

with obedient matter:

As for Solomon's dictum, a woman of virtue who can find...For if it so happens that the matter of man is excellent and suitable, neither dominating him nor corrupting his constitution, that matter is a divine gift. To sum up: it is not easy, as we have mentioned, to control suitable matter. If it is suitable, it is not impossible for someone trained to quell it. For this reason Solomon---both he and others---inculcated all these exhortations. Also the commandments and prohibitions of the law are only intended to quell all the impulses of matter.<sup>45</sup>

The implication of these thoughts about the relation of sex identity to virtue is that woman is limited in her capacities for the full virtuous action that a man is challenged by Moses Ben Maimon to achieve. He does not conclude that a woman ought not to be taught about virtue. In Introduction to the Talmud it is suggested that a woman can be taught in a simple way by using allusions and parables:

A third reason the Sages composed their Drachos in the form they did, is that the instruction of the nations' masses must be through such allusions and parables, so that the women, youth and children will also benefit from it until it will eventually develop and perfect their intellects; and then they will comprehend and be enlightened to the actual meanings behind those allusions.<sup>46</sup>

It is not clear from the passage whether he would expect women to enter into a progressive enlightenment as would happen naturally with youth and children as they grew older. It is more likely that he believed that women would always maintain a slightly inferior relationship with the knowledge of virtuous actions than did men. If this is so, then Moses Ben Maimon argued that women and men are wise in different ways, and that the way a man was wise and virtuous was more inclusive and therefore superior to the way in which a woman was wise and virtuous.

Moses Ben Maimon wrote a great deal more about women. A book on the Code, entitled The Book of Women is divided into four subjects: marriage, divorce, the rape of virgins, and wayward women. These issues are

also discussed in The Commandments and in Book III, chapter 49 of The Guide for the Perplexed. His thoughts on these subjects are more descriptive and prescriptive than philosophical, and therefore they will not be included in the analysis of this paper.

In conclusion, Moses Ben Maimon has been shown to have defended a thorough going sex polarity which had striking similarities with the philosophy of Aristotle, as well as with some aspects of Plato and the Pythagoreans. A summary of his concept of woman is as follows:

	<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>
<u>Opposites</u>	hot, like form	cold, like matter
<u>Generation</u>	contributes fertile seed, pure blood	contributes infertile seed, impure blood
<u>Wisdom</u>	demonstrative argumentation strong soul	practical art weak soul
<u>Virtue</u>	rule	obey

Although Moses Ben Maimon wrote in Arabic, his works were soon translated into Latin and Hebrew where he exerted a direct influence on Albert the Great who decided that Aristotle's works ought to be translated into Latin to become the basis for Christian philosophy as they had for Islamic and Jewish philosophy. Albert the Great was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas who subsequently developed a new philosophy based on Aristotle. In this way Moses Ben Maimon was an important link in the transmission of Aristotelian rationale for sex polarity in the West.

#### Leone Ebreo (1450-c. 1521)

The final of the four Jewish philosophers to be considered in this paper is an example of the new developments in neo-Platonism which sprang up during the emergence of Italian Renaissance Humanism. Leone Ebreo was

born in Lisbon, educated in Seville, and moved to Naples to escape persecution as a Jew at the age of thirty-two in 1492. Trained as a physician as well as a philosopher, he practiced medicine first in Naples and then moved to Florence where he entered a school led by Marsilio Ficino. Many commentators have identified him with the name Jehudah Abrabanel, but there is some controversy about this identification.<sup>47</sup>

The revival of Platonism by Ficino was in part a rejection of the scholastic rigidity of Aristotle that had been incorporated into western university education. Since so much of the philosophical support for sex polarity came from an Aristotelian rationale, it is not surprising that the new turn to Plato would effect theories of sex identity as well. Leone Ebreo is significant because he suggests a theory of sex complementarity which supports a view of the equality of the sexes along with a significant differentiation between them.

Marsilio Ficino, in his Commentary on Plato's Symposium reintroduced the figure of Diotima, as a female guide for Socrates in the midst of philosophical disputation.<sup>48</sup> Leone Ebreo, in his Dialoghi d'amore introduced the female figure 'Sophia' as a guide for Philo. Ebreo's Sophia went far beyond Plato's and Ficino's Diotima in that she was the main disputant among two characters instead of simply being one among many. She led the dialogue, and interacted with Philo throughout.

In a significant way the dialogue reveals a rejection of the Aristotelian model of sex identity. The male Philo represents the model of an individual who has difficulty controlling his emotions, while the female Sophia represents the model of a rational individual who does not give into emotions. Neither has achieved full self governance, that is, integration of the emotions with reason, but the perspective from which they

approach self governance is the inversion of the Aristotelian model which had argued that in the female the reason was without authority over the emotions. In the following example from the dialogue we can see this interaction between a reasoning female figure and an irrational male figure vividly portrayed:

Sophia: And yet I would rather have your love governed by the reason from whence it sprang. Reason governs every person of worth.

Philo: But such a love can never possess a lover and, though we might call it love, such a love would not truly be love. True love controls the reason, as well as the entire being of a lover, with a most wonderful power and marvelous violence. It troubles the mind, the very throne of judgment, more than any other single human condition, cancelling from the memory all other things with which it might concern itself, and utterly splitting a man in two, making him, in truth, adjunct of the beloved. 49

In this description by Philo, the male has become an adjunct of the female. This inverted the suggestion of Moses Ben Maimon that a female is always meant to be in conjunction with a male.

Philo continued his description of the emotional turmoil of the lover:

Philo: True love makes the lover an enemy of society and its pleasures; he is a lover of solitude and melancholy; he is filled with passions, girded with sufferings, tormented by doubts, crucified by desire, nurtured by thought, harassed and cruelly afflicted by suspicion, stabbed by jealousy; he is without respite in his distress, without rest from his labors, attended always by sorrow and filled with sighs, never freed from anxieties and wrongs. ...Does it seem rational to you, Sophia, that a man caught up in such a web cannot be made to abide the laws of reason or the rules of prudence?

Sophia: Please, Philo, soften your words. I know only too well that lover's pangs are as nothing compared to his protestations!

Philo: Your not believing them proves only that you have not experienced them. 50

The humour and give-and-take of the male and female disputants in the dialogue created a positive model of interaction for the concept of woman in relation to man in the category of wisdom. Neither Philo nor Sophia was always right, in contrast to the dialogue in which Diotima represented ultimate

truth for Socrates. In Leone Ebreo's dialogue the two key figures were complementarity to one another. So in this way his methodology suggests a model of sex complementarity.

In another area as well, Ebreo rejected the Aristotelian model of sex polarity. Aristotle had argued that women were capable only of friendships of inequality with their husband in a marriage. The inequality flowed from the superior nature of the husband in relation to the wife. Drawing upon the Aristotelian theory that there are three kinds of friendship (of utility, of pleasure, and of the good), Ebreo argued that there are in marriage all three levels of love:

Philo: Obviously the love of husband and wife is pleasurable. Yet it must be bound up as well with good. Indeed, it is for this reason that a mutual love survives the enjoyment of its delights, and not only persists but continuously grows through participation in the good. More, the good and pleasurable elements in married love are augmented by that of advantage---for each of the married lovers ever derives benefit from the other, which greatly contributes to the nurture of their love. Thus, married love, being essentially pleasurable, is maintained because of its connection with both advantage and good. 51

The argument went further to make the claim that the love between a man and a woman must include an intellectual component. In this way Leone Ebreo elevated the relationship beyond a simple physical desire for union and separation:

Sophia: Perhaps when we have wearied of divine things, we can discuss our own human friendship with more open minds.

Philo: The proposition that happiness consists in the ultimate activity of the soul is both true and necessary. It is similarly true and necessary that happiness consists in an activity of the most noble and spiritual faculties of the soul---the intellect... There are two forms of knowledge: one precedes and causes love---but such knowledge is not simply one; the other form is caused by, and follows, love---this knowledge is simply one, and results in the enjoyment of perfect union...The same holds of the relation between men and women: from some knowledge of them there springs love and desire which lead to the union in knowledge, which is the end of desire. 52

The affirmation of the similar role of the intellect in man and in woman is clearly in the tradition of Plato who had argued that women as well as men could reach the heights of wisdom and rule the republic. An obvious question that needs to be asked is whether Leone Ebreo's neo-Platonism led him to adopt a more radical position of sex unity which denied the philosophical significance of any distinctions between the sexes.

There are some hints in the following passages that Ebreo did move away from a sex complementarity which defended the equality of the sexes while maintaining the importance of distinctions between men and women towards a sex unity which abolished distinctions:

Philo: When two spirits are absorbed in spiritual love, their bodies desire to further the union so that no distinction whatsoever may obtain between them, with the union being in all ways complete... Finally, I wish to inform you that whereas we before defined love in general, the proper definition of love of a man for a woman is the conversion of the lover into the beloved together with a desire for the conversion of the beloved into the lover. And when this love is mutual, it is defined as the conversion of each lover into the other. 53

While the implication here is that the separate individuals lost their unique distinctions in this process of conversion, it could be argued that there are still two separate beings, the man who is converted into the woman, and the woman who is converted into the man. However, in a subsequent passage Leone Ebreo described the union in terms of a complete loss of distinctions:

Philo: I know you to possess virtue, intelligence, and beauty, admirable and seductive, and my will desired your person, which reason correctly judged to be noble, excellent and worthy of love in every way. My affection and love has transformed me into you, begetting in me a desire that you may be fused with me, in order that I, your lover, may create with you, my beloved, a single being, with our mutual love making of our two souls, one, which may in the same way vitalize and inform our two bodies. 54

This single soul for two bodies suggests a new variation of sex unity in the context of Ebreo's other views that female and male are of equal worth and dignity.

Another possible way to classify the direction that Ebreo's theory of sex identity took is to make a distinction between two kinds of sex complementarity: fractional complementarity and integral complementarity. In the first kind of complementarity each sex contains a fraction of a whole being, which when joined make up a single whole. Frequently theories of sex identity take this direction, woman brings intuition and man reason, or man brings the public realm and woman the private, and so forth. This fractional complementarity is misleading and denies the fundamentally unique, complete existential nature of man and woman. In the dialogue by Ebreo it would be argued that he described Philo as bringing a fraction of the whole, and Sophia the rest. In contrast to this kind of fractional complementarity, there is also a movement towards developing a theory of integral complementarity between men and women in which each participant enters the relationship as a whole person. Then the union remains a union of two separate and distinct beings. In this context Ebreo's theory would be a step along the way, but it fails to reach integral complementarity.

Integral sex complementarity is always vulnerable to sliding into a sex unity view because of its emphasis on the equality of the two sexes. Similarly it is vulnerable to sliding into sex polarity because it argues that there are significant differences between women and men. Philo's arguments could be interpreted, then as beginning with a view to support a sex complementarity, but ending with a slide into sex unity.

The Dialoghi d'amore were extremely popular. They were originally written in Italian but were soon translated into French, Spanish, Latin, and Hebrew. A copy was found in the library of Spinoza.<sup>55</sup> Leone Ebreo then contributed in a shift away from Aristotelian grounds for sex polarity to a Platonic defence of the equality of the sexes in his description of the interaction and theories of Sophia and Philo. While it may be argued

by some critics that the use of female figures, rather than of real women, in philosophical dialogues does not help the development of women as philosophers, it would seem that the significant number of women writers who emerged during the renaissance could support the opposite claim, namely that the presence of female figures paved the way for women to actually participate in philosophical debate. If this interpretation is correct, then Leone Ebreo was the first Jewish philosopher to help bring about a positive environment for women to become philosophers themselves.

### Conclusion

In this paper four different early Jewish philosophers have been considered with specific attention to their concept of woman in relation to man. The following summarizes the different kinds of theories that they proposed:

Name	Century	Theory
Philo	first	sex polarity
Solomon Ibn Gabirol	eleventh	sex neutrality
Moses Ben Maimon	thirteenth	sex polarity
Leone Ebreo	fifteenth-sixteenth	sex complementarity

It would seem that Plato's arguments for sex unity did not have any direct influence on the direction of Jewish philosophy with the exception of Leone Ebreo. On the other hand, there is a striking similarity between Philo's theory and Aristotle's although there were no direct references to the Greek philosopher's concept of woman in Philo's texts. It is only in Moses Ben Maimon that the direct use of Aristotle to defend a sex polarity is found. Aristotle's development of logic was integrated into the philosophical texts of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, which may be the explanation

for his adoption of a sex neutrality position. From these four examples it can be concluded that each Jewish philosopher appeared to develop his own position concerning sex identity without directly incorporating the previous work of other Jewish philosophers. Maimonides may have been influenced by Philo, but he did not refer directly to his concept of woman, but rather went to Aristotle to defend his position.

There is the other important question of the influence of other factors than the arguments of previous philosophers on the concepts of women studied in this paper. Obviously, there are many different strains of thought which enter into a writer's formulation of a theory of sex identity. For Jewish philosophers the religious texts, practices, and historical situations of men and women all play a part. However, it seems to be useful to extract the single philosophical thread from the greater whole in order to more closely examine the degree to which philosophical arguments played a part in their theories. The conclusion from this examination must be that Greek philosophy played a very important part in the development of theories of the concept of women in early Jewish Philosophy.

## Footnotes

1. This paper was read and discussed at Colloquim at The University of Bari-Ilan in April 1987 and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in May 1987.
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4. Ibid., pp. 83-126.
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6. Philo, Questions on Exodus (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, Ltd., 1929-62), I, 8, p. 46.
7. Philo, Genesis, op. cit., I, 37, p. 37.
8. Ibid., I, 47, p. 37.
9. Ibid., IV, 38, pp. 213-214.
10. Aristotle, Politics 1260<sup>a</sup> 1-5.
11. Philo, Genesis, op. cit., II, 49, pp. 130-131.
12. Ibid., IV, 15, p. 288.
13. Ibid., I, 4, p. 3. and I, 8, p. 5.
14. Philo, On Mating with the Preliminary Studies (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press and William Neinemann, Ltd., 1929-62), no. 26-28, pp. 471-473.
15. Philo, Genesis, op. cit., I, 33, p. 20.
16. Ibid., I, 46, p. 26.
17. Philo, On Abraham (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, Ltd., 1929-62), 98-102, pp. 53-55.
18. Philo, Genesis, op. cit., Book III, 18, p. 203.
19. Philo, On Matting, op. cit., 6-7, p. 461.
20. Philo, Genesis, op. cit., I, 26, pp. 15-16.
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22. Ibid.
23. Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol (New York: Arno Press, 1973) no. 2, p. 3.
24. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, The Kingly Crown (London :Valentine and Mitchell, 1961), XXXV, p. 56.
25. Anselm's sex neutrality is seen in the ontological argument in which God is simply defined as 'That than which no greater can be thought'. See Proslogium in Anselm of Canterbury (Toronto and New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976), Vol. I, chapter xv. His views of sexual differentiation can be found in "Prayer to St. Paul" in The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1973), 395-415, pp. 153-4.
26. Avicenna, The Life of Ibn Sina (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1964)
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28. Aviceborn, Choice of Pearls, (New York :Bloch Publishing Company, 1925), no. 374, pp. 83-4.
29. Ibid., no. 268, p. 67.
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31. Ibid., III, 8, pp. 431-2.
32. Ibid., I, 6, 31.
33. The Medical Aphorisms of Maimonides (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 19--), 25, 29, pp. 184-5.

34. Maimonides, "Discourse on Sexual Intercourse" in Essays on Maimonides, The Medical Works of Maimonides, Appendix II, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 290.
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37. Maimonides, The Guide, op. cit., III, 8, p. 436.
38. Maimonides, Book of Women in The Code of Maimonides (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), no. 2, p. 93. See also, The Commandments, op. cit. "It does not apply to women: The Talmud says explicitly: The duty to be fruitful and multiply is laid on the man, not on the woman." Positive Commandment, no. 212, Vol. 1, p. 228.
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40. Ibid., 16, 25, p. 38.
41. Maimonides, The Guide, op. cit., III, 54, p. 632.
42. Maimonides, The Commandments, op. cit., Positive Commandment, no. 13, Vol. 1, p. 20.
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45. Ibid., III, 48, p. 600.
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47. Renaissance Philosophy: Volume I, The Italian Philosophers, edited by Arturo Fallico and Herman Shapiro (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1967, p. 172. See also John Reidl, A Catalogue of Renaissance Philosophers (1350-1650) (Hildesheim, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1973), p. 26.
48. Marsilio Ficino, Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love (Dallas, Texas, Spring Publications, Inc., 1985); The use of a female figure as guide for a philosopher was also used by Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962).
49. Leone Ebreo, "On Love and Desire :A dialogue between Philo and Sophia" in Renaissance Philosophy, op. cit., pp. 172-3.
50. Ibid., p. 222.
51. Ibid., p. 195.
52. Ibid., pp. 211-212.
53. Ibid., p. 217.
54. Ibid., p. 219.
55. Ibid., pp. 172-3.